THE MINI KONAMI COMPANION

retro GAMER

50 YEARS OF FUN

I spent most of my formative years either growing up in my local arcades or delving into the world of import gaming thanks to my Mega Drive and Super Nintendo. As a result, my relationship with Konami games goes back decades. I have enjoyed early arcade classics such as *Frogger, Amidar* and *Track & Field* and embraced the company's many, many shooters. *Scramble, Gradius, Salamander, Thunder Cross II, Xexex* and *Axelay* all have special places in my heart, while I grew up on excellent Konami franchises such as *Contra* and *Castlevania.*

The company, for me, personally was pretty much untouchable during the 16-bit and 32-bit eras of gaming and it's here that the developer arguably put out some of its strongest games. Hideo Kojima was becoming a rising talent in the company, the likes of *Pro Evolution Soccer* and *Metal Gear Solid* evolved spectacularly during this period, while new IP like *Suikoden* and *Silent Hill* captured the imagination of gamers the world over.

It's rather pleasing, then, to be able to put together this delightful little tome of essential Konami games to celebrate the company's recent 50th anniversary. It's an exhaustive collection of the team's favourite games and we'd argue that they're the first titles you should consider picking up if you're planning to explore Konami's heritage in a little more depth

Enjoy the booklet!

CONTENTS

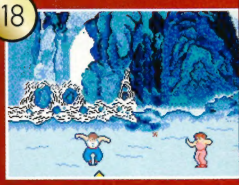
04

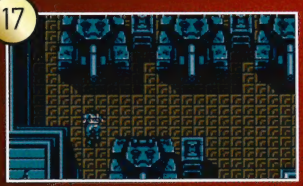
11

24

07

10

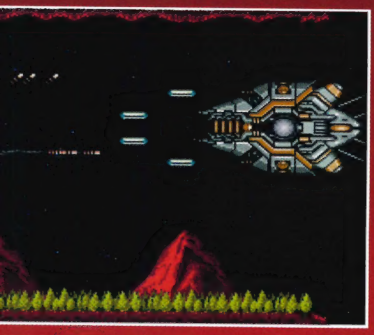

18


17

29

12

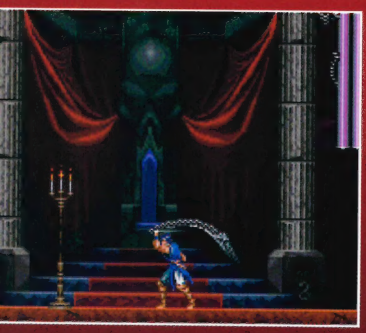
21



28

06

31



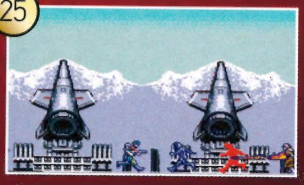
13

04 METAL GEAR SOLID
06 THE SIMPSONS
07 SCRAMBLE
07 SUNSET RIDERS
08 SILENT SCOPE
08 SALAMANDER
08 GTI CLUB: RALLY CÔTE D'AZUR
09 SNATCHER
09 INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER '98
09 BUCKY O'HARE
10 FROGGER
11 GRADIUS
12 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
12 BISHI BASHI SPECIAL
12 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
13 KID DRACULA
13 ZONE OF THE ENDERS
13 CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE
14 CONTRA
14 TRACK & FIELD
15 ALIENS
15 AXELAY
15 CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW
16 PENGUIN ADVENTURE
17 SPACE MANBOW
17 METAL GEAR

26

18 YIE AR KUNG-FU
19 TIME PILOT
19 AMIDAR
20 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
22 BEATMANIA IIDX
23 DANCING STAGE EUROMIX
24 PARODIUS
24 GRADIUS V
25 THE GOONIES
25 SUIKODEN
25 GREEN BERET
26 SILENT HILL 2
27 SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES
28 GYRUSS
28 ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
28 TWINBEE
29 METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER
29 CONTRA: HARD CORPS
29 THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
30 METAL GEAR ACID 2
30 BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND
31 CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS
31 VANDAL HEARTS
31 SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

25



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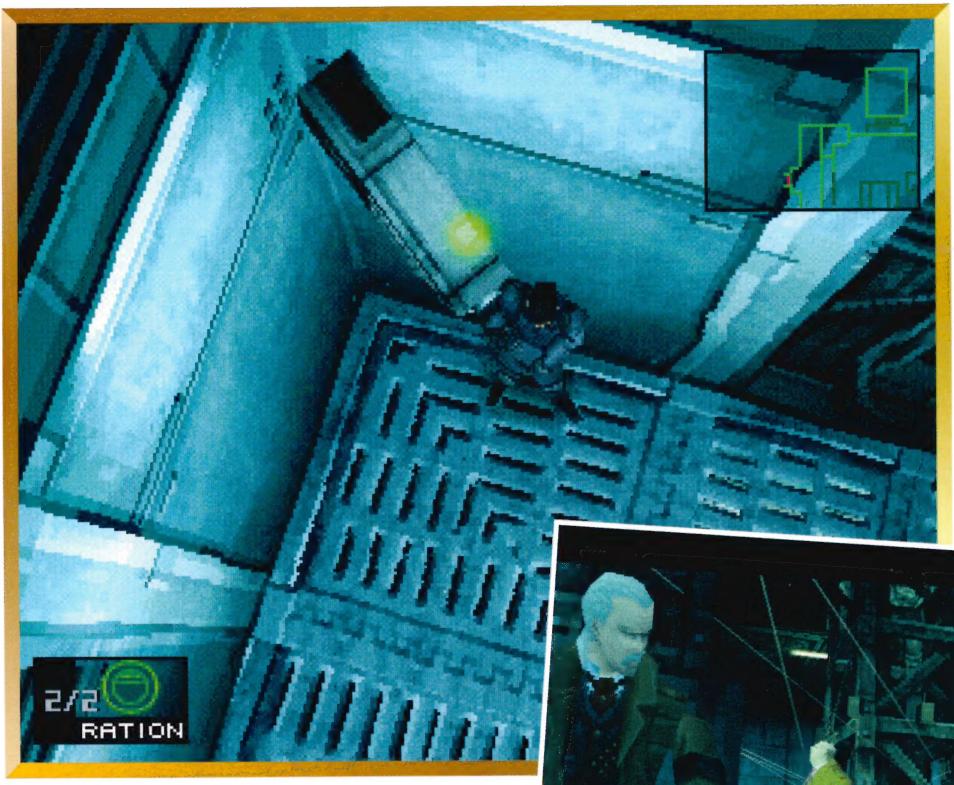


» [PlayStation] *Metal Gear Solid* blazed a trail for complex and cinematic stories in videogames.

METAL GEAR SOLID

A WORLD DRIPPING **WITH TENSION**

PLAYSTATION, PC, 1998

There's so much that can be said about Solid Snake's return to the gaming world after almost a decade on the sidelines. For a start, there's the quality of the game – every aspect of it is polished to perfection. The level of graphical detail is extraordinary, with the developers even remembering to show Snake's breath in the cold Alaskan air, while just about every gamer can identify the distinctive alert sound that tells you that you've been spotted. The game's dialogue is eminently quotable, too, thanks to the memorable performances by David Hayter and the rest of the talented voice cast.

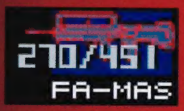
Of course, then there's the actual experience of playing the game. The stealth action makes sense – guards are attracted by sounds and lured by footprints, and you can take advantage of that. But what sets the game apart is a hallmark of Hideo Kojima's productions at Konami, which is the number of clever ideas from out of left field. The use of ketchup to escape a jail cell is one thing, but the way the game integrates its own physical packaging and the physical console itself into the game experience is quite another, as anybody who was spooked by Psycho Mantis' knowledge of their gaming history will tell you. The team set out to

EMPTY THE ARMOURY

It's always best to avoid a fight in Metal Gear Solid, but when combat is the only option, these are the tools at Snake's disposal

SOCOM

■ The first weapon you acquire is a basic handgun. It has a 12-round capacity, and can be upgraded with a suppressor.



FA-MAS

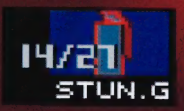
■ This is a fully automatic assault rifle. It's loud, so you'll only want to use it when enemies are already on alert.

PSG1

■ When you need to take out enemies from afar, this sniper rifle is useful. Make sure to take some Diazepam, or your aim will be off.

CHAFF GRENADE

■ This particular type of grenade disables nearby electronics – including your own radar system.

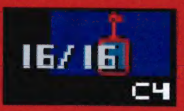


STUN GRENADE

■ It won't kill anybody, but this grenade can disorientate foes and buy you some time in a gunfight.

GRENADE

■ Pull the pin, throw it far away and watch as it explodes five seconds later. It's not subtle, but it's definitely effective.



C4

■ This plastic explosive can be affixed to surfaces and detonated by remote control. It's good fun to use if you like setting up traps.

CLAYMORE

■ As a proximity mine, the Claymore's explosion is triggered when a hapless victim walks too close to it.

NIKITA

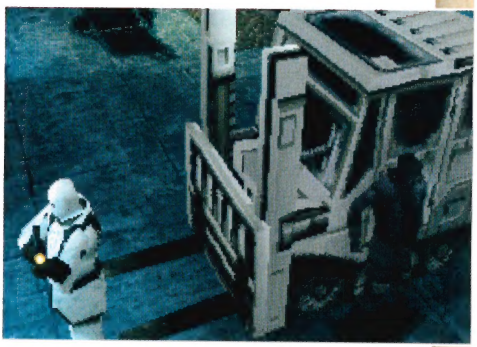
■ The remote-controlled Nikita missile is useful for destroying electronic devices and patrolmen in areas Snake can't enter.

STINGER

■ These missiles are your weapon of choice when raw power is needed. Point the launcher at the target, lock on and fire.

make the greatest PlayStation game ever, and there's definitely a case to be made that it succeeded.

Finally, there's the way that *Metal Gear Solid* influenced other games. It was one of the best examples of cinematic storytelling in a videogame to date, without any need for the prerendered FMV scenes that were still in vogue at the time, and plenty of developers picked up a trick or two after seeing it. Plus it was the leading light of 1998's stealth game revival, overshadowing not only contemporaries like *Tenchu* and *Thief*, but becoming the benchmark by which later games, such as *Headhunter* and *Splinter Cell*, were measured.



THE SIMPSONS

SPRINGFIELD'S FINEST **STREET FIGHTER**

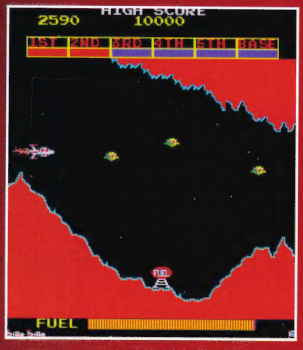
ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1991

Konami created some incredible scrolling fighters throughout the late Eighties and early Nineties, and *The Simpsons* represents the company at its creative best. Like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* before it, *The Simpsons* does a wonderful job of capturing the cartoon's distinctive look and it's filled with plenty of nods to the classic TV series (which was then in its third season).

Mechanically it's similar to other scrolling fighters from Konami, so there's an attack button and a jump button, and pressing both together creates a stronger super attack. The big difference here, however, is that family members are able to team up to pull off stronger moves (which change depending on the combination of characters).

Despite the popularity of the game on release it was only converted to the C64 and MS-DOS formats. It was eventually re-released by Electronic Arts for Xbox 360 and PS3, but sadly, those versions have long been delisted, meaning the arcade original is your best option.

» [Arcade] Each member of the iconic family gets their hands dirty, even lovable Lisa.



» [Arcade] *Scramble* really helped define the shoot-'em-up genre back in 1981.

SCRAMBLE

AGAINST **ALL ODDS**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1981

While there's a lot of confusion over whether *Scramble* kickstarted started the *Gradius* franchise, there's no confusion over its quality. While many games from *Scramble*'s time period featured a lone fighter facing off against an enemy invasion, few felt as structured as *Scramble* did. The ever-scrolling stages change through six different environments, which helps to enforce the enormity of your mission. While there's plenty of shooting in *Scramble*, you'll also need good reflexes to avoid rockets, which lay dormant until you're in their path. There's also an ever-dwindling supply of fuel, which needs to be topped up by blowing up fuel tanks (don't ask).

Scramble presents a constant challenge, particularly when you have to deal with low-flying comets and difficult skyscraper layouts, but it never feels unfair. Like *The Simpsons*, its huge popularity in the arcades didn't lead to many home conversions, but it does crop up on numerous compilations, including the recently released *Arcade Classics Collection*.

SUNSET RIDERS

ROOTIN' TOOTIN' **COWBOY SHOOTIN'**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1991

***Sunset Riders* is a nice over-the-top alternative to the *Contra* series.** They're both run-and-guns at heart, but *Sunset Riders* amps everything up, nicking mechanics from the likes of *Shinobi* and *Rolling Thunder* and throwing in some ridiculously vibrant graphics for good measure.

Teaming up with up to three other players, you're required to take out bounties on opponents that range from a knife-throwing Native American, to a dapper gunslinger. There's a strong selection of power-ups to discover, alongside plenty of variety to its stages.

While it was ported to both the Mega Drive and Super Famicom, all versions tend to fetch a pretty penny on eBay. It's a title that's crying out for a re-release.

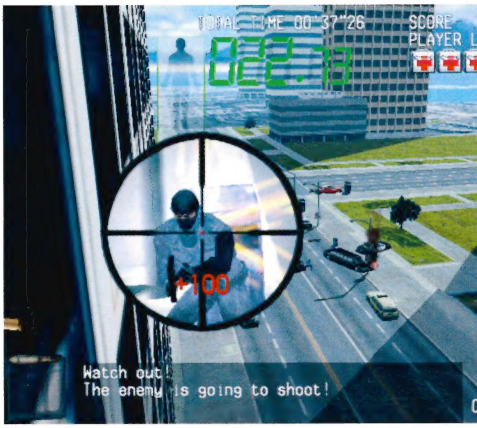
» [Arcade] Its hard to not get swept up in *Sunset Riders*' gunslinging Wild West action.

SILENT SCOPE

TAKE A **LONG SHOT**

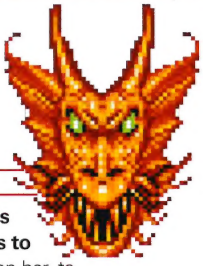
ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1999

This is an arcade gun game with a difference. The vast majority of the time the main screen will display a single, very distant view of a terrorist incident in progress. Your job is to take out the bad guys, who you see in much more detail by looking down the scope of your sniper rifle – quite literally, as the mounted gun peripheral on the arcade cabinet includes its own dedicated tiny display, a feature which home conversions struggled to replicate.



SALAMANDER

MAD **MASH**



ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1986

After the success of *Gradius*, this spin-off made some big changes to the formula. Out went the selection bar, to be replaced with standard power-ups, and gameplay switched between horizontally scrolling stages and newly introduced vertical stages. Considerably more organic enemies were added to the game, and the American version (titled *Life Force*) went the whole hog, changing the setting to the infected innards of an alien. This was then bizarrely ported back to Japan.

GTI CLUB:
RALLY CÔTE D'AZUR

MINI **MAYHEM**

ARCADE, 1996

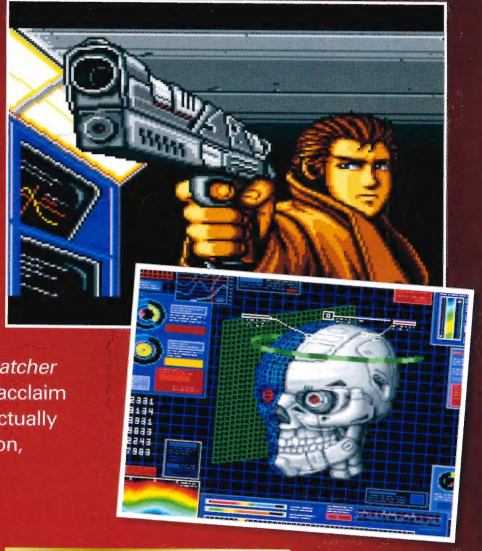
While running supercars ragged around closed circuits is fun, there's just as much fun to be had bombing up and down hills in a Mini Cooper, and that's the terror you can bring to the residents of a sleepy French Riviera village in *GTI Club*. The single location of Konami's arcade racer hosts a variety of different tracks as well as many shortcuts, so knowledge of the side streets – as well as a fair amount of skill with the handbrake – is the key to victory. *GTI Club* was successful enough to spawn two more arcade instalments, followed by a PS3 game in 2008.

SNATCHER

BUILT TO **LAST**

NEC PC-88, VARIOUS, 1988

Hideo Kojima's cyberpunk graphic adventure borrows more than a little from *Blade Runner*, but with results like this it would be churlish to complain. The player directs Gillian Seed through investigation scenes and target-shooting sections, as he investigates the menace of body-stealing robots in Neo Kobe. *Snatcher* wasn't a great commercial hit but gained critical acclaim and a cult audience, and it might be cheaper to actually learn Japanese than buy the rare Mega-CD version, which is the only one available in English.



INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER '98

IT'S COMING HOME **(AGAIN)**

N64, 1998

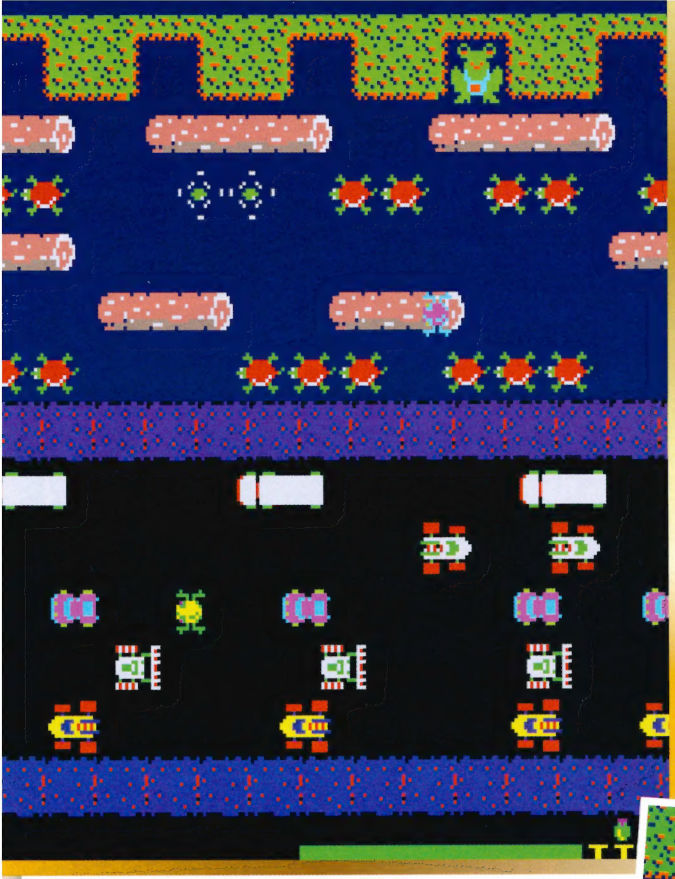
Konami put its best foot forward with this instalment of its football franchise. It wasn't too different to its excellent predecessor, but given that it was in a different league to its competitors anyway, that was no bad thing. Plus, it did improve things a little by including extra animations and presentational touches.

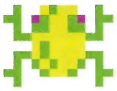
BUCKY O'HARE

HIGH **STAKES**

NES, 1992

Comic adaptation *Bucky O'Hare* hit TV screens in the early Nineties, and Konami managed to get a couple of really good games out of its brief time in the sun. The arcade beat-'em-up is good but we really like this NES platformer – it takes after the *Mega Man* games, as you can tackle the stages in any order and rescue characters with new abilities. It's technically impressive, too, as you'd expect from a game directed by future Treasure founder Masato Maegawa.





» [Arcade] The concept behind *Frogger* is a strange one for a videogame, sure, but there's no denying that it's a true arcade classic.

FROGGER

HOP **TO IT**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1981

When you think about the first arcade games to feature distinctive characters, it's clear that *Frogger* can stand proudly alongside the likes of *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* as a pioneering game. Like so many of those early hits, it was easy to learn and hard to master, too – all you needed was a four-way joystick to get *Frogger* home alive, but the hazards on the road and river made that a challenge.

In an era where shoot-'em-ups dominated the videogaming world, *Frogger* was an unusual game. While there was an element of danger, in the form of *Frogger*'s fate should he meet the business end of a truck, the game didn't include any combat elements at all. Coupled with colourful visuals, the result was a game which had a broad appeal to players of all ages and persuasions, and *Frogger*'s long-term success is testament to that.

GRADIUS

SHOOT THE **CORE!**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1985

Konami has a strong roster of excellent shoot-'em-ups to its name, and the *Gradius* series is perhaps the most famous of them – even if it was originally known as *Nemesis* in non-Japanese arcades. The game features memorable levels with interesting features like erupting volcanoes and wrap-around vertical scrolling, and it's packed with classic visuals, too, from the distinctive boss fights to the iconic Moai heads.

The thing that really set *Gradius* apart from its competition was its innovative approach to power-ups, which allowed players to pick up items and exchange them for ship upgrades. These cost as little as one item for a speed boost, but the better ones cost more – the option drones, gun upgrades and such. The downside is that losing all of those hard-earned power-ups upon losing a life makes it really hard to carry on, but that difficulty directly caused the creation of the famous Konami Code to aid in the testing of the NES conversion, so we'll forgive it.

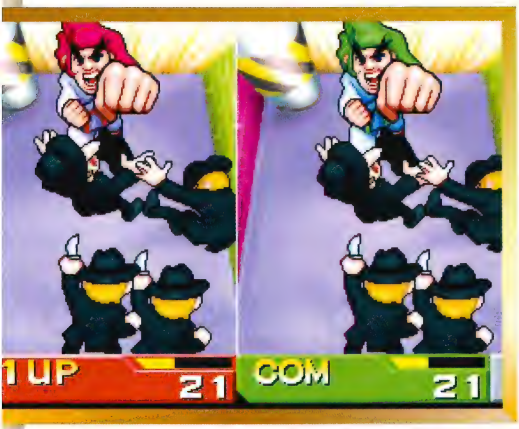
» [Arcade] This boss appears throughout the game and when he does make sure you 'shoot the core'!

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

THE BEAUTIFUL **GAME**

PS2, VARIOUS, 2006

Konami's football games have always been good fun, but when the *ISS* series transformed into *Pro Evolution Soccer* in the Noughties, it rose to become one of the two titans of the scene. The series has always prioritised tight mechanics and realism over flashy presentation and licensed teams, meaning that it has often been preferred by serious football fans. The gap between Konami's game and its competitors was widest at the end of the PS2 generation, after years of refinement.



BISHI BASHI SPECIAL

MAD **MASH**

PLAYSTATION, 2000

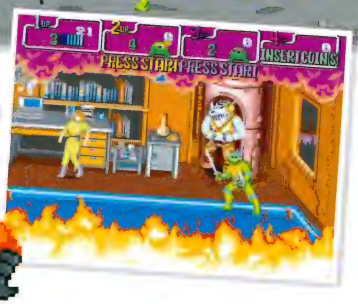
If you're a frequent host of multiplayer sessions, this minigame collection should definitely be one of the games you include in your regular rotation. *Bishi Bashi Special* is a compilation of *Super Bishi Bashi* and *Hyper Bishi Bashi*, containing 85 different button-bashing challenges ranging from kicking mobsters to chucking custard pies at your wedding guests. While only three controllers are supported at once during games, eight players can take part in party mode so everybody can get involved.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

HEROES IN A **HALF-SHELL**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1989

When you think about cartoon franchises that would make good scrolling beat-'em-ups, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*' martial arts action ensures that it stands out as an obvious option – and Konami's mastery of developing licensed games in that particular genre made it a game to remember. A four-player cabinet allowed a group of players to take the full gang of pizza-powered reptilian heroes into battle, as they fought through burning buildings and city streets to take down the evil Shredder and his henchmen.



KID DRACULA

WISE UP, (BLOOD) SUCKER

GAME BOY, 1993

Cutesy spin-offs of famous series seem to be big business in Japan, judging by the existence of games like *Virtua Fighter Kids* and *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti*. Konami used its successful *Castlevania* series as the base for *Kid Dracula*, a platform game which sees our young vampiric hero fighting to fend off Galamoth and the monsters that have turned to his side, though he's forgotten most of his spells. The game is perfect for the handheld format of the Game Box, with bold graphics and very solid game design.

ZONE OF THE ENDERS

MECH MY DAY

PS2, VARIOUS, 2001

Few early PlayStation 2 games could justify the wave of hype that preceded the console, but this was one of the first to show what the system could do in the right hands. Set in the vicinity of Jupiter, the game tasks players with controlling the mecha unit Jehuty, which must be returned to the Space Force following an attack from a hostile army. The game's combination of melee combat, shooting and spectacular visuals have aged well, even if its length is slightly short.

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

HIGH STAKES

NES, 1989

Drac's back, and it's up to Trevor Belmont and his band of buddies to defeat the vampiric dark lord. *Castlevania III* is the best of the original NES trilogy as it refines the platform action of the series' first game, adding companion characters, a variety of routes and multiple endings to ensure that the game offers superb replay value. It doesn't hurt that *Castlevania III* looks great, too, and the music is excellent – particularly in the Japanese version, which benefits from extra sound channels.

CONTRA

EIGHTIES **MACHO ACTION**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1987

Inspired by the action movies of the Eighties (its lead soldiers, Bill and Lance, are clearly based on Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone) *Contra* works thanks to its fast-paced action, interesting selection of power-ups and varied mechanics. It also switches things up by having traditional scrolling stages and levels that utilise a perspective that has you travelling 'into the screen' and deeper into Red Falcon's bunkers. *Contra* remains one of Konami's most successful early franchises, so it's hardly surprising to see a new compilation dedicated to the series arriving later this year.

TRACK & FIELD

GOLD MEDAL

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1983

While many preferred the multitiered events of *Hyper Sports*, it's worth highlighting what a big deal *Track & Field* was on release. Designed to tie-in with the 1984 Summer Olympics, this lets you compete in six button-mashing events: 100 Meter Dash, Javelin Throw, High Jump, Hammer Throw, 110 Meter Hurdles and Long Jump. It proved extremely popular for Konami, leading to numerous sequels over the years, with the most recent, *Hyper Sports R* appearing on Switch in 2018.

ALIENS

WAS THAT IN THE **MOVIE?**

ARCADE, 1990

While *Aliens* features many of the big moments from the film, including the rescue of Newt and a final face-off against an Xenomorph Queen, it also features a lot of made up nonsense, too. Not that we're complaining, as the new enemies and bosses that are introduced keep you on your toes, while sequences like the frantic APC chase prove that Konami excelled at making action games. What a pity, then, that this never received a home release.

AXELAY

MORE THAN **MODE 7**

SUPER NINTENDO, 1992

While everyone lost their marbles over *Axelay*'s sensational Mode 7 stages, it's worth remembering that its traditional side-on levels are just as sumptuous to look at and that it has a soundtrack that's every bit the match for its eye-scorching visuals. Mechanically it's on-point, too, with a generous selection of switchable weapons that need to be carefully managed if you want to survive each stage.

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

FANG-**TASTIC**

PLAYSTATION 3, VARIOUS, 2010

After several near misses during the Nintendo 64 and PS2 eras, MercurySteam and Kojima Productions finally nailed a 3D *Castlevania* game. *Lords Of Shadow* retains the exploration of earlier games in the series, but amps things up considerably from a combat perspective, playing more like a *God Of War* or *Ninja Gaiden* game. Its titans are straight out of *Shadow Of The Colossus*, while the high production values and solid voice cast are as slick as any other game of the time. A staggeringly good reboot.

PENGUIN ADVENTURE

ANTARCTIC **ANTICS**

MSX, 1986

MSX gamers will undoubtedly have a soft spot for Konami as the company was a prolific developer of high-quality software for the 8-bit platform, and *Penguin Adventure* is emblematic of its output on the hardware. The game sees our plucky penguin protagonist Penta on a quest to retrieve the golden apple that will cure Penguette, the gravely-ill princess of the penguin kingdom. In order to get it, he has to journey through caverns, across icebergs, under the sea and even into outer space, in a series of pseudo-3D stages that rank amongst the most visually appealing scenes on the system.

As well as running along and avoiding obstacles, Penta has plenty to do – he can trade the fish he's collected for items, and must battle bosses every so often. There are also plenty of secret routes and items to discover. Don't forget to pay attention to when you take a break while playing, too. It's important, since you can only see the good ending if you pause the game once!

» [MSX] Before Solid Snake, Hideo Kojima helped create Penta.

» [MSX2] You'd have to spend a lot of money if you want to own *Space Manbow* today.

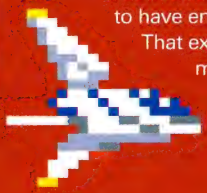
SPACE MANBOW

DANCE THE **MANBOW**

MSX2, 1989

This oddly named game is a Japanese exclusive, and one which is much like any other horizontal shoot-'em-up you've played, including those in Konami's own *Gradius* series. It does differ ever so slightly, though: as you need to keep picking up power-ups due to the decaying power of your main weapon, but just about everything else from the lasers to the options can be found elsewhere.

But sometimes a game doesn't need to be particularly innovative – it just needs to have a clear aim that is executed well. *Space Manbow* does exactly that, providing a shooter of high quality. The level designs are both attractive and interesting, huge bosses are delivered as you'd hope, and the soundtrack is one of the more memorable ones to have emanated from the MSX2's YM2149 chip. That explains why the game fetches so much money on the second-hand market – even loose copies have changed hands on auction sites for over £100.



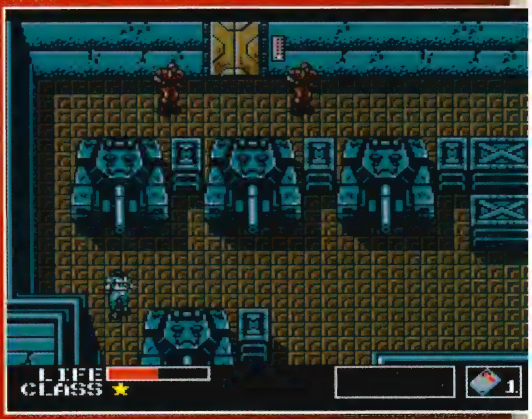
METAL GEAR

INFILTRATE AND **DESTROY**

MSX2, VARIOUS, 1987

Although many players didn't experience the *Metal Gear* series for the first time until it hit the PlayStation, that's no reflection on the quality of the early games – they've been very good from the beginning. The original *Metal Gear* includes many of the key elements that the series would become known for – the emphasis on stealth, the importance of picking up your equipment over the course of the mission, and even the use of cardboard boxes to hide in.

The original *Metal Gear* is very relevant in plot terms, too. This game concerns Solid Snake's solo mission to Outer Heaven, where the bipedal nuclear-equipped tank Metal Gear is being built. Important characters that would play a major role in later games are introduced for the first time, too, including the likes of Big Boss and Gray Fox.



» [MSX2] *Metal Gear*'s final boss is famously retconned in *Metal Gear Solid V*.

YIE AR KUNG-FU

FISTS AND FEET **OF FURY**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1985

Konami's brawler might not have been the first fighting game to arrive on the scene, but it did establish many of the elements that would go on to define the genre. It's ironic, then, that the company was never able to capitalise on that success when Capcom and SNK were facing off during the Eighties and Nineties.

Fortunately, Konami managed to get everything right with *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and even today it remains an entertaining fighter thanks to its challenging opponents, diverse range of moves (which include flying kicks and groin punches) and a slick control system. *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*'s large range of opponents are all typically equipped with weapons, meaning you'll need to use a variety of strategies in order to best them.

Yie Ar Kung-Fu's success saw it ported to numerous systems at the time, meaning that even if you'd never experienced the satisfaction of besting Blues in the arcade, you were certainly able to experience it in the comfort of your own home.

» [Arcade] Check out RG194 for more info on *Yie Ar Kung Fu*.

» [Arcade] There's a bit of *Asteroids*' DNA in *Time Pilot*, but Konami's classic ramps up the action.

TIME PILOT

TIME **FLIES**

ARCADE, VARIOUS ,1982

Before Yoshiki Okamoto struck gold at Capcom with the likes of *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II*, he was making waves at Konami with a range of interesting shoot-'em-ups, including this excellent effort. *Time Pilot* set itself apart from other shooters of the time thanks to its unique premise, which saw the action take place across time zones, instead of the usual space age backdrops that were so popular in the late Seventies and early Eighties. Your plucky pilot has to rescue his parachuting buddies while battling through five distinct eras: 1910, 1940, 1970, 1982 and a very optimistic take on 2001. Each time zone has its own unique flying craft to obliterate, so you'll be facing off against biplanes and blimps in 1910 and blisteringly fast UFOs in 2001 (we told you it was optimistic). Enemy patterns and ship movements become more intense with each time skip, too, with everything becoming harder still upon a full loop. While a sequel, *Time Pilot '84*, followed in 1984, Konami's original effort remains our favourite.

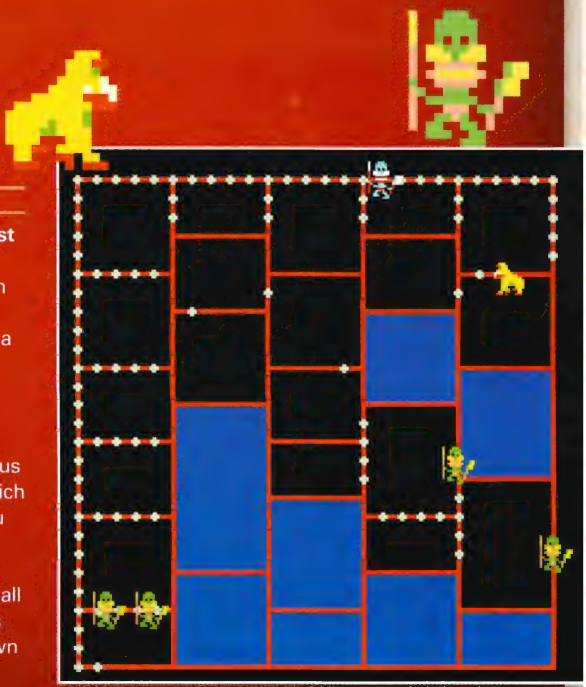
AMIDAR

A-**MAZE-ING**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1981

The quickest of glances at *Amidar* will suggest that it's a shameless *Pac-Man* clone. As it stands, it actually borrows ideas not only from Namco's game, but also a Japanese lottery system called Amidakuji and the end result is a fun variation of the popular maze game.

Like *Pac-Man* you're stuck in a maze and surrounded by enemies (headhunters in this case) but there are several differences that make *Amidar* stand apart from its more famous peer. The most notable is a 'jump' button, which sends all enemies up into the air, allowing you to dash under them, but you must also fill in square and rectangular areas of the maze by collecting all the dots that surround them. It's all finished off with the bonus round, which sees you trying to feed a pig by dropping food down pipes. Now *that* wasn't in Namco's game.



» [PlayStation] *Symphony Of The Night* ushered in a new era of explorative RPG-like *Castlevania* games.

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

DRACULA **REBORN**

PLAYSTATION, 1997

Even though *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* was planned as a direct sequel to the PC Engine exclusive, *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood*, Konami also intended it to be a fresh start for the popular franchise. Koji 'Iga' Igarashi's game achieved just that, wisely embracing 2D when other developers were experimenting with the third dimension, and creating a whole new subgenre (don't make us say it) in the process.

Even today, it's easy to see what makes *Symphony Of The Night* so special. The gigantic castle you explore can be tackled in numerous ways (providing you have the required abilities to reach certain areas, of course) and offers a real sense of progression as you explore the cavernous innards of Dracula's home. Carefully placed save points ensure that retrying boss fights rarely becomes a frustrating experience, while the increasingly powerful weapons and abilities you pick up further adds to the game's overall enjoyment.

The 2D visuals, which incorporate some cool 3D elements, hold up tremendously well, while they're matched by an equally evocative soundtrack that ranks as one of the best in the series. Low sales in the UK have led to PAL copies now selling for extortionate amounts online (especially if they include the CD soundtrack) meaning it's become the jewel of many owners' collections. It's fortunate, then, that this Gothic classic has been resurrected numerous times over the past two decades.

AT WHAT COST?

You don't need deep pockets to own Konami's masterpiece

US PLAYSTATION £45+

■ *SOTN* was far more successful in the US, turning up on the Greatest Hits label. While it lacks the CD soundtrack found with the PAL release, it's far better optimised. The original US release of the game typically sells for double the price of the Greatest Hits version. Both are still cheaper than the PAL release, however.

SATURN £110+

■ This is rising in price and could eventually dethrone the popular PAL version. It's a mixed bag, because while it allows you to play as Maria Renard and includes new areas of the castle, it also suffers graphically compared to the PlayStation original and has horrible slowdown at times. It's one for the collectors, we feel.

XBOX 360 £20 (disc) £6.75 (digital)

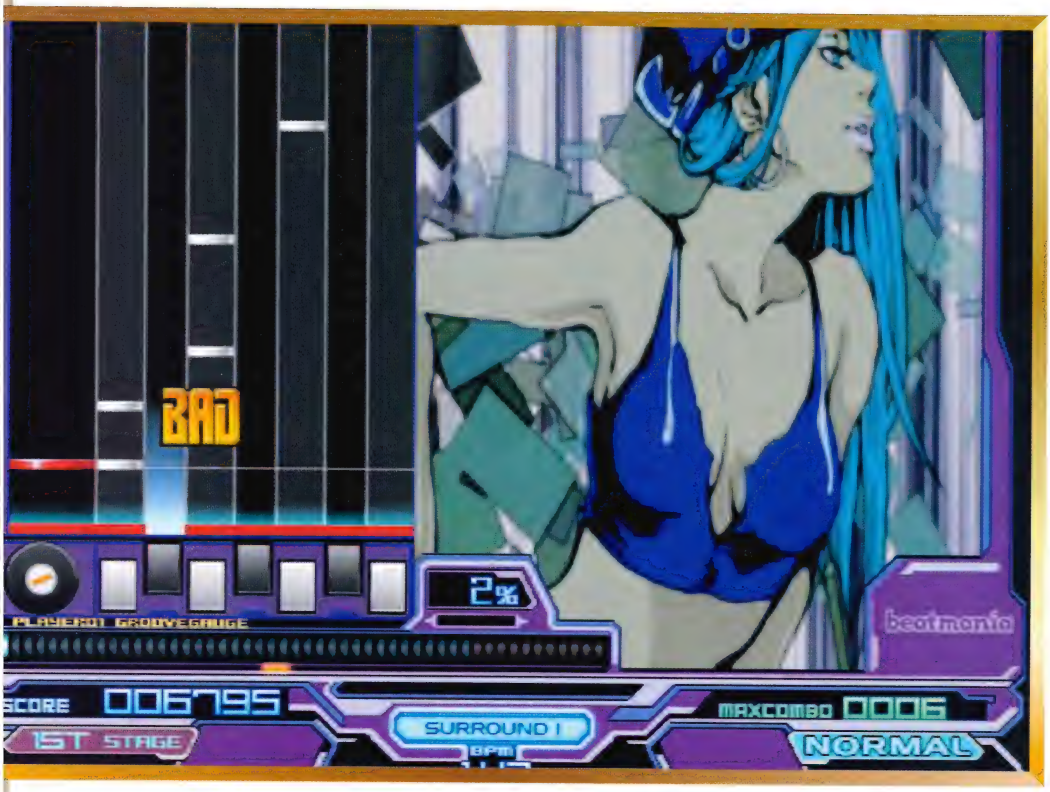
■ Microsoft earned plenty of Kudos when it announced *Symphony Of The Night* was heading to Xbox Live Arcade. It's an excellent port of the game and is optimised for HDTVs thanks to solid work by Backbone Entertainment. While it exists in physical form in the US, the easiest way to get it is directly from Xbox Live.

PSP £30 (disc) £7.99 (digital)

■ When Konami released *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* for Sony's handheld it included ports of both *Rondo Of Blood* and *Symphony Of The Night*. *SOTN* requires a little bit of work to unlock, but it's worth doing as it's a revised version that features items dropped from the original and a more accurate localisation.

PS4 £15.99 (digital)

■ *Castlevania Requiem* on the PS4 features both *SOTN* and *Rondo Of Blood*. It's effectively the same version of the game that appeared on the PSP but it's obviously been updated to run effectively on modern day televisions.



» [Arcade] It might not look like much in a screenshot, but playing *Beatmania IIDX* is a thrilling experience.

BEATMANIA IIDX

BASSDROP **FREAKS**

ARCADE, PS2, 1999

***Beatmania* was the game that kicked off Konami's dominance of the arcade music game scene, but it was the sequel that has proven to be perhaps the developer's greatest work.** The game's cabinet features a massive sound system, and requires players to use a turntable and seven keys (two more than in the original *Beatmania*) to hit notes in time with the music. While it isn't much to look at visually, the game is known for its impressive song lists and ferocious challenge.

Beatmania IIDX outlasted not only most of its competitors, but even its own sequel *Beatmania III*, which was discontinued after five versions in 2002. Since then the game has developed into an ongoing series in its own right – 14 PS2 versions were released from 2000 to 2009. The most recent arcade instalment, Beatmania *IIDX 26 Rootage*, was released in November 2018 but you shouldn't expect to find it outside of Japan.

DANCING STAGE EUROMIX

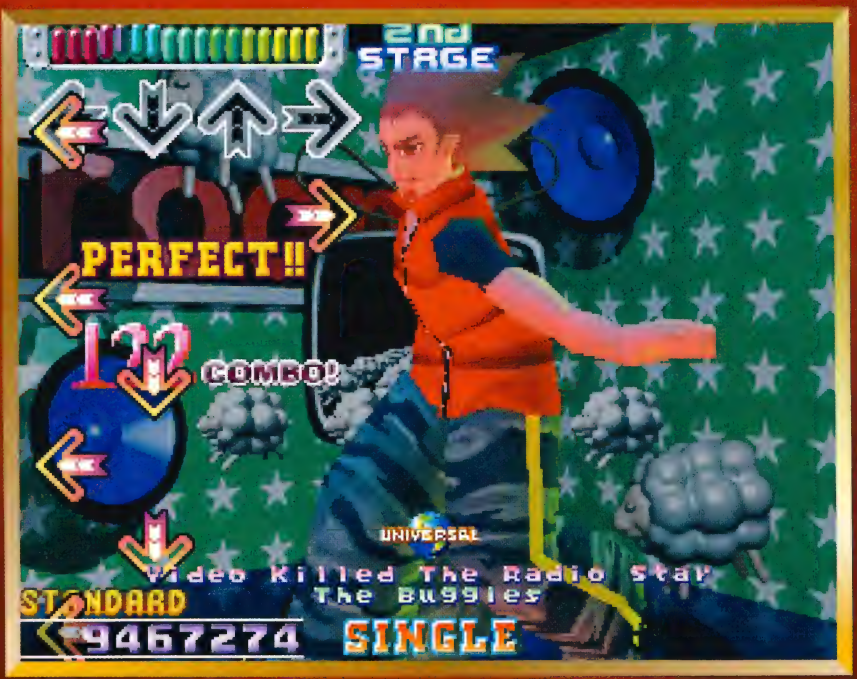
"SHOW ME YOUR HOTTEST MOVES!"

ARCADE, PLAYSTATION, 2000

» [Arcade] Konami's superb dancing series is still a mainstay in arcades today.

The *Dancing Stage* series (or *Dance Dance Revolution* outside of Europe up until recently) is a rhythm action titan, and it's not hard to see why – there was nothing else like it in the late Nineties, and it was easy to figure out exactly what you needed to do just by looking at it. For many players in the UK, this was the version that served as an introduction to the series, and its popularity spawned a legion of imitators including the likes of *Dance:UK* and *The Jungle Book: Groove Party*.

The soundtrack was the secret to the success of *Dancing Stage EuroMix*, as it featured a strong mix of Konami originals and licensed tracks. Casual players were drawn in by the likes of Boyzone, Chumbawamba and The Buggles, while the more heavily invested crowd appreciated *Dancemania* tracks like Captain Jack and *Dance Dance Revolution* staples such as Afronova. And that's what ultimately gives the game its staying power – nearly two decades on, it's not hard to find a machine still in active service in UK arcades.



PARODIUS

WAR OF **THE WEIRD**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1990

This comedy spin-off of the *Gradius* series is one of the best known cute-'em-ups out there, and it might even be better than the source material. As well as some excellent colourful graphics and bizarre enemies like cat-headed pirate airships and bosses like the one we've shown here, the game allows you to choose from four characters – each of which offers a unique set of power-ups based on various entries in the main *Gradius* series.

GRADIUS V

THE BACTERIANS ARE **BACK**

PS2, 2004

In an interesting twist, the last numbered entry in the *Gradius* series has the distinction of being developed by a team of ex-Konami staff. Treasure took on development duties for this game, and chose not to fix what wasn't broken – new features are mostly limited to greater control over your Option drones. But it plays brilliantly as you'd expect from the developers of *Radiant Silvergun* and *Ikaruga*, and thanks to an assist from *Border Down* developer G.rev it looks great too.

THE GOONIES

HEY, YOU **GUYS!**

FAMICOM, VARIOUS 1986

There's a lot of oddness about this game – it's based on one of the most beloved cult movies of the Eighties, one that has strong resonance with American audiences, yet it was never given a proper US NES release. Instead it was confined to PlayChoice-10 and Nintendo VS System cabinets. That's a shame because although it's simplistic, *The Goonies* is a good arcade platformer which handles brilliantly and offers a real challenge. It's well worth importing, though.

SUIKODEN

A WORLD OF **WARRIORS**

PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS, 1995

***Suikoden* was one of the first JRPGs to really make an impact on the PlayStation, kicking off a series on a system that would host many of the genre's classics.** The game tasks your hero with leading a revolt against a corrupt state by finding and recruiting 108 warriors from rebel factions. The cast and plot are backed by exciting battles that mix 2D sprites with 3D backdrops, as well as a brilliant soundtrack.

GREEN BERET

RED **TERROR**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1985

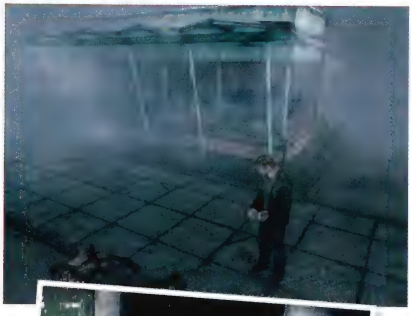
Back in 1985, few arcade run-and-guns could compare with *Green Beret* – or *Rush'n Attack* if you're American (or *Green Bert*, if you're a *Your Sinclair* fanatic). The game massively improved on the side-scrolling combat template of games like *Kung-Fu Master* by adding platforms and ladders, as well as weapon pick-ups that allowed you to toast enemies with a flamethrower or blow them to bits with grenades. It was a perfect slice of Cold War entertainment, and converted well to many home platforms.

» [PC] There are some unsettlingly weird enemies to battle in *Silent Hill 2* and James isn't much of a fighter.

SILENT HILL 2

A MASTERFULLY **MACABRE SEQUEL**

PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS, 2001



Few videogames are as emotionally draining to play as Konami's exceptional horror sequel. From the moment you walk along the mist-filled path that leads to the town of Silent Hill you're immediately on edge and that tension rarely lets up as the game continues. Indeed, there is an uneasiness and oppressiveness to Konami's game that was incredibly unusual at the time and – *Shattered Memories* aside – no other game in the series has matched it. The likes of *Resident Evil* relied on hammy jump scares and waves of zombies to wear down your resolve, but Konami damaged you psychologically, scarring you for life with endless unsettling revelations which hinted at numerous taboo subjects that rarely entered the medium of mainstream videogames. Get the later *Director's Cut* as it's the definitive experience.

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

SCARIER THAN WII **SHOVELWARE**

WII, VARIOUS, 2009

When Team Silent scattered to the four winds, numerous developers were allowed to take a stab at Konami's revered series. After impressing Konami with *Silent Hill: Origins*, Climax Studios found itself in charge of *Shattered Memories*, a loose remake of the original *Silent Hill*. The team did not disappoint. Everything about Climax's game works exceptionally well, from Sam Barlow's meticulous script, to the clever and inventive use of the Wii's controller and the nightmarish runs through the game's alternate dimension. PS2, PS3 and PSP versions also exist, but the original remains the best.

» [Wii] *Shattered Memories* is a clever retelling of the original *Silent Hill*, you play as Harry Mason trying to find his missing daughter.

KEY CHARACTERS

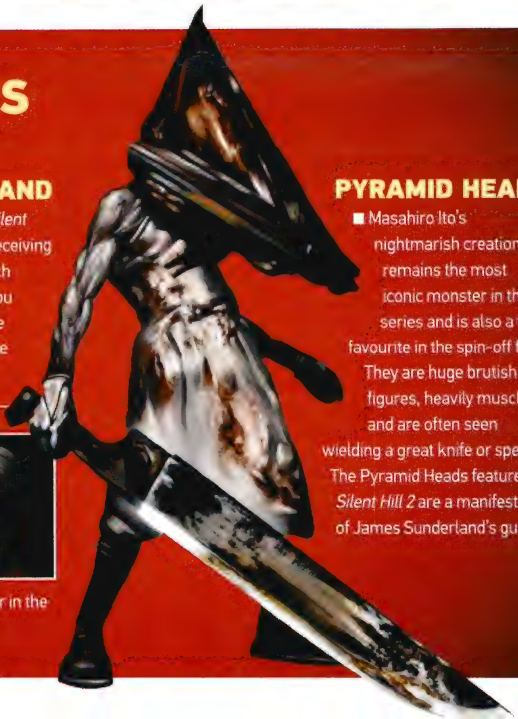
Who's who in Silent Hill 2

JAMES SUNDERLAND

■ James is the protagonist of *Silent Hill 2* and visits the town after receiving a letter from his wife Mary, which sounds perfectly normal until you realise she's been dead for three years. You soon learn that, like Silent Hill itself, there are two very different sides to his character.

MARIA

■ This character comes into contact with James throughout his stay in Silent Hill. She looks identical to James' dead wife, although she wears very different clothes and has a different personality. She becomes a playable character in the scenario, Born From A Wish, which debuted on Xbox.



PYRAMID HEAD

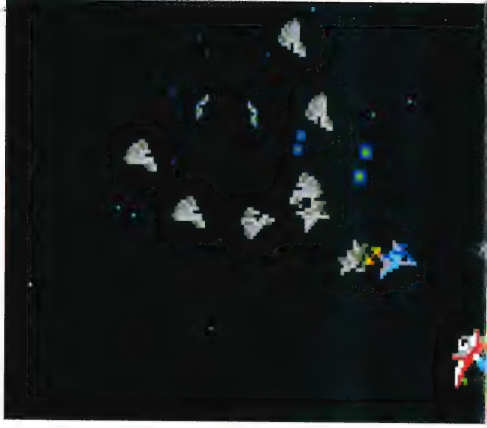
■ Masahiro Ito's nightmarish creation remains the most iconic monster in the series and is also a firm favourite in the spin-off films. They are huge brutish figures, heavily muscled and are often seen wielding a great knife or spear. The Pyramid Heads featured in *Silent Hill 2* are a manifestation of James Sunderland's guilt.

GYRUSS

ONE MORE **WARP**

ARCADE, VARIOUS 1983

Yoshiki Okamoto's second shoot-'em-up for Konami plays like a cross between *Tempest* and *Galaxian*, and is just as frantic as you'd expect. Fuelled by an upbeat electronic version of JS Bach's *Toccata And Fugue In D Minor*, enemies zoom in and out of the screen at alarming speeds and you have to take them down as quickly as possible. It gets incredibly hectic the further you warp towards Earth and things get even trickier once you have to contend with incoming asteroids that can't be destroyed.



ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

SPARKS WILL **FLY**

MEGA DRIVE, 1993

While it took a while for Konami to embrace the Mega Drive, owners of Sega's 16-bit machine certainly didn't miss out. *Rocket Knight Adventures* is a crazy offering from Nobuya Nakazato (*Contra III, Contra: Hard Corps*) that features blisteringly fast-paced action sequences, shoot-'em-up sections and the chance to battle pigs in a gigantic mech suit. It's not the easiest of games, but the sheer wackiness of Nakazato's classic constantly compels you forward, if only to witness what comes next.

TWINBEE

CUTE BUT **DEADLY**

ARCADE, VARIOUS, 1985

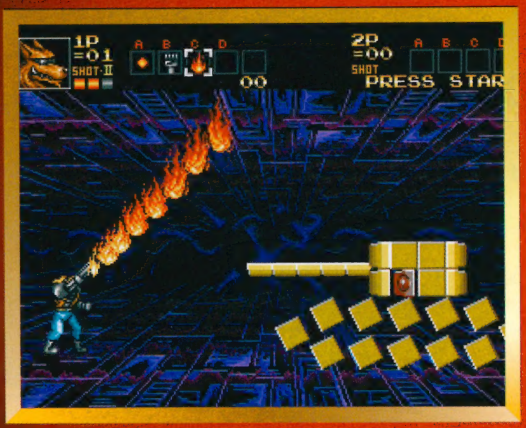
***TwinBee* makes a spot here because it's not only a great little shooter, but also one of the earliest examples of a cute-'em-up.** Its design is quite similar to *Xevious*, but the similarities end there as Konami's game swaps out that game's dour space themes for overt cuteness. The pastel backdrops are a world away from typical Eighties shmups; your anthropomorphic craft comes equipped with tiny little arms, while power-ups are hidden inside colourful bells. Such was the popularity of *TwinBee*, it spawned an entire franchise.

METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

THE PSP'S OWN **BIG BOSS**

PSP, VARIOUS, 2010

As great as *MGSV* is, Kojami's final Konami game wouldn't exist without this. The PSP often delivered home console experiences in the palm of your hand, but it really pushed the boat out with *Peace Walker*. In addition to making missions into snack-sized scenarios, *Peace Walker* also introduces the excellent Mother Base system, which improves on the army management mode first seen in *Portable Ops*. It's every bit as unique as the *Acid* series and one of the series' high points.



CONTRA: HARD CORPS

MEGA **MACHO** TIME

MEGA DRIVE, 1994

If you were lucky enough to own both a Mega Drive and SNES during the Nineties, you were treated to an excellent one-two punch of *Contra* action. Graphically, the Mega Drive's *Hard Corps* is stupendously good, delivering all manner of crazy effects that you wouldn't typically associate with the machine. It delivers with its gameplay too, thanks to multiple routes, four very different characters to play as, a useful power slide and immensely satisfying boss encounters.

THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

FULL OF **EASTERN PROMISE**

SUPER NINTENDO, 1991

Even today *Mystical Ninja* remains an entertaining arcade-style romp, and is deliciously silly in places thanks to its delightful aesthetics, charming cutscenes and kooky bosses. It cleverly mixes elements from various genres, impresses with some clever level design on its later stages and even manages to recreate the first level of *Gradius* for good measure.

METAL GEAR ACID 2

KONAMI'S **TRUMP CARD**

PSP, 2005

While the first *Metal Gear Acid* is an intriguing card game, it has many annoying niggles that make it irksome to play. Konami ironed all these issues out for the sequel, making it an essential addition to any PSP collection. The new cel-shaded visuals offer *Acid*'s sequel a distinctive, stylish look, while everything from navigation to card management is far more streamlined than before. Additional missions add to the game's overall longevity and there's even an option to play in stereoscopic 3D thanks to the included Solid Eye viewing device.

BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

KOJIMA LIGHTS UP THE **GBA**

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2003

While no *Metal Gear* game graced the GBA, Nintendo's handheld was still blessed by Hideo Kojima's presence. Using a cartridge, which harnessed the sun's rays by way of a photometric light sensor, *Boktai* actively encouraged you to play outside so you could keep your gun's charge high. It was popular enough to spawn three sequels, two for the GBA and a third for the Nintendo DS.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

AN EXPLOSIVE **CLASSIC**

SNES, 1992

Konami's first 16-bit *Contra* for consoles was a revelation. While the top-down Mode 7 stages are beginning to show their age, it was hard to not be wowed by them in 1992. It's an excellent example of the run-and-gun genre, and the best game in the series (depending on whether you speak to a SNES or Mega Drive fan). The graphics are excellent, with brilliantly detailed sprites and enormous bosses, while the awesome soundtrack easily matches the insane action.

VANDAL HEARTS

BLOOD BATH

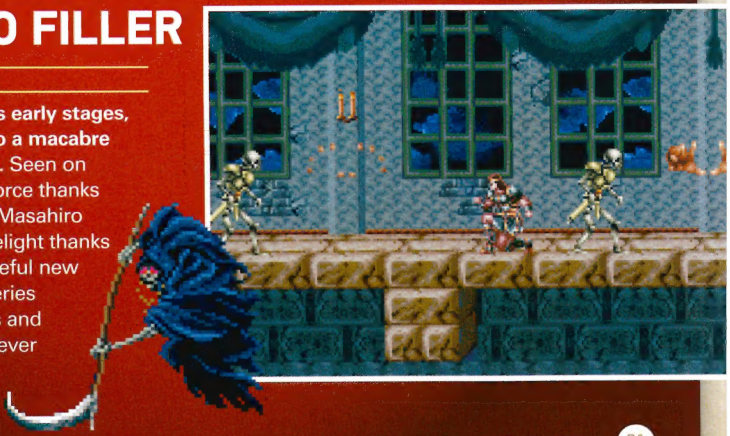
PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS, 1996

While a lot has been made of *Vandal Hearts*' gory deaths, to focus on them and them alone would do the game a disservice. It's an exceptionally accomplished strategy game with balanced mechanics and a solid selection of character classes to master that range from archers and monks to mages and clerics. While the story is perhaps a little weak, *Vandal Hearts*' brilliantly balanced combat mechanics ensure every battle is a satisfying challenge.

SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

ALL KILLER, **NO FILLER**

SUPER NINTENDO, 1991



Ignore the garish graphics of its early stages, as *Castlevania IV* blossoms into a macabre masterpiece once it gets going. Seen on release as a graphical tour de force thanks to its extensive use of Mode 7, Masahiro Ueno's game remains a dark delight thanks to its satisfying level design, useful new moves for Simon Belmont, a series of exhilarating boss encounters and one of the best soundtracks to ever appear in a videogame.

retro GAMER

THE MINI KONAMI COMPANION